

MPS Review Frequently Asked Questions

Why are changes needed in MPS? Why now?

The Milwaukee Public Schools face significant academic and fiscal challenges:

- Academic outcomes throughout MPS remain unacceptably low.
- The district is “identified for improvement” under federal law for its persistent academic failures, and is subjected to state corrective actions and sanctions.
- The district is under court order to reform the way it educates and identifies special needs students.
- As this report shows, the district’s increasing expenses, declining enrollment and the financial impact of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program have made the district’s budget trends unsustainable for taxpayers.

At the same time that MPS is facing these challenges, we also have historic opportunities that we have to take advantage of now.

- Through the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) , the district is slated to receive an unprecedented influx in federal education funding to support special needs and low income students.
- In addition, MPS and the state have the opportunity to receive millions more in competitive incentive grants aimed at dramatically reforming and improving schools.

What are the Governor, Mayor and State Superintendent proposing?

The Governor, Mayor and State Superintendent are partnering to lead an effort to drive innovation, school improvement and fiscal responsibility in the Milwaukee Public Schools. The plan has several key elements:

- 1. Driving school improvement and reform and leveraging federal funds.** They will join together with a broad base of local community stakeholders to drive major school improvement and reform in MPS. Marshalling resources from throughout state and city government, and in collaboration with partners throughout Milwaukee, a state/local team will develop a comprehensive, district-wide school improvement plan that promotes innovation, accountability, and results. The plan will also identify opportunities to leverage existing funds, including what is anticipated to be more than \$100 million in federal stimulus funding for low-income and special needs students, to support improving student achievement in MPS. This plan will help lay the foundation for ARRA competitive grant opportunities.
- 2. Leading the effort to secure federal incentive grant funds.** Working together with educators, parents, and the community, the Governor, Mayor and State Superintendent will work to lead Milwaukee-based efforts to compete for federal grant funding available through the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA). These highly competitive federal grants are intended to reward states and districts that are making major reforms to successfully reduce achievement gaps and improve student learning. A strong state and local partnership is essential for these unprecedented federal funding opportunities.

3. Putting a plan into action – with or without new federal funds. While a key goal of this effort is to successfully compete for federal incentive grant funds, the Governor, Mayor and State Superintendent believe the results of this partnership – aimed at dramatically improving student achievement – must be implemented regardless of the outcome of any federal grant application. As a result, under federal and state authority vested in the Governor and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the district-wide school improvement plan developed through this partnership effort will become the state’s “corrective action plan” for the Milwaukee Public Schools. Under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, DPI is required to impose corrective action on MPS due to its status as a district “identified for improvement” for more than two years in a row, and MPS is required to comply.

4. Increasing fiscal accountability and transparency in MPS, while requiring results for performance. ARRA requires unprecedented fiscal accountability and transparency for federal funding. In addition, an independent report commissioned by Governor Doyle and Mayor Barrett on the finances and operations of MPS reinforces that MPS’ budget is currently unsustainable, due to increasing expenses and declining enrollment, and that MPS lacks a strong performance management system to drive, implement, and sustain changes needed to bring about fiscal and academic reforms. Through the MPS Innovation and Improvement Initiative, the Governor, Mayor and State Superintendent will put in place new efforts to oversee financial and performance management in the district. These improvements will also be incorporated into the district’s corrective action plan required under federal law.

5. Correcting the State Funding Flaw for the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. Milwaukee property taxpayers pay a disproportionate share of the program’s costs. These costs get attached to the Milwaukee Public School levy, drive up property taxes and decrease the amount of money that flows into our classrooms. We’re hopeful this scenario is about to change. Governor Doyle has included in his budget a provision that phases out after five years the property tax burden caused by not including school choice program students in the calculation of school aids for Milwaukee.

How will the community be involved in this effort?

Any reforms that are made must have the support of the community, including the teachers and principals who work with our children every day. We recognize that there has already been a significant level of community dialogue around moving the district forward, including the development of the district’s “Working Together, Achieving More” strategic plan, which involved not only district leadership, but teachers, principals and others.

Building upon the work that has already begun, we will establish an MPS Innovation and Improvement Advisory Council, comprised of respected local leaders. The Council will help to inform and guide the development of the corrective action plan, which will focus on both academics and finances. The Council will also help to drive the development of

federal incentive grant opportunities, and put MPS and the state in the best position to improve student achievement and compete for federal dollars.

Who will manage and staff this effort?

The Governor, Mayor and State Superintendent are still working to develop the logistics of these next steps; however, it is expected that a project manager will be identified to manage the initiative on a day-to-day basis, including oversight of academic improvements, fiscal reforms, and improvements to performance management. The project manager will report to the Governor, Mayor and State Superintendent, and will work closely with the community-based Advisory Council. State and local government staff will be directed to provide support and technical assistance to the effort, and the Governor, Mayor and State Superintendent will work to leverage additional resources from the community to implement the needed fiscal and academic reforms.

What is the role of the current school board in this effort?

It is expected that the current school board will work together with the Governor, Mayor and State Superintendent to meet what should be mutual goals: improving academic outcomes and financial stability. However, this report and others have raised questions about the ability of current MPS leadership to manage the district's finances and make appropriate investments to improve student learning. MPS must make changes in order to achieve different outcomes.

The Governor, Mayor and State Superintendent plan to move swiftly, working with the community, to develop and implement needed academic and fiscal reforms, and to take advantage of the unparalleled federal opportunities that exist. While they expect the school board to support these efforts in the best interests' of Milwaukee's children and citizens, they will not delay moving forward if the Board refuses to act.

What is the role of Superintendent Andrekopoulos in this effort?

The Governor, Mayor and Superintendent expect that Superintendent Andrekopoulos will work closely with them during his last year in office to improve student outcomes and shore up the district's finances. There are some examples now of successful state/local partnerships that he has helped implement, including the \$10 million investment in mathematics education we put in place last year.

What is the role of the union(s) in this effort?

The support of MPS teachers, principals, and other staff is essential to implementing any successful reforms. A critical component of the next steps in this effort will be engaging with those educators and staff who work with MPS students every day to develop meaningful, workable reforms that will improve student learning.

How will you ensure that Superintendent Andrekopoulos or the school board actually implement any reforms that are developed?

It is in everyone's best interests that MPS be academically and fiscally sound, and the Governor, Mayor and State Superintendent expect MPS leadership to work together toward that goal. However, under federal law, the state is required to impose corrective

action on MPS to address its persistent academic failures. MPS is required to comply, or it risks losing federal funds. As a result, there is a strong incentive on everyone's part to work together.

What is the role of the new Superintendent?

Superintendent Burmaster will be working closely with us to develop the state's corrective action plan that is required under federal law, and we expect the next Superintendent will do the same.

Is this a takeover in disguise?

No. The purpose of this effort is focused, strategic, and time-sensitive. There is very limited time to make the best use of new federal funds coming into the district, and to compete for more funds to implement reform. In addition, the goal of a focused performance management effort will be to drive fiscal reforms in a relatively short period of time.

To do this, the Governor, Mayor and Superintendent are making full use of federal funding opportunities, as well as federal law that already requires intervention in MPS. While a change in governance is not off the table, it is not the focus of this effort.

How will you move forward on the fiscal reforms? Aren't all of these fiscal changes required subjects of collective bargaining?

The report identifies options that could save the district up to \$100 million in non-instructional operations. While many of these reforms may or may not be right for Milwaukee at the present time, they are indicative of the kinds of changes that could be pursued to put the district on stronger financial footing. The options identified in the report merit further review, including a thorough vetting of the pros and cons of each.

Many of the reforms would require negotiation with local unions. The Governor, Mayor and Superintendent respect the right of workers to collectively bargain issues related to their employment. However, several other areas of potential savings do not require any bargaining, and are policy changes that could be implemented now. These include changes to MPS' purchasing, transportation policies, and facilities, to name just a few.

In addition, it is clear that declining enrollment is a major factor affecting the district's finances. Improving academic outcomes and creating more highly successful schools – a main focus of the next steps – would encourage increased enrollments, and decrease the fiscal pressure on the district.

The report calls for an instructional diagnostic similar to what was done for the non-instructional side. Are you going to pursue this?

This is being considered as part of the next steps. Given the timing of the federal grant opportunities, however, the Governor, Mayor and Superintendent are not going to wait for the results of this kind of review before moving forward with a school improvement and reform plan. However, the kind of instructional diagnostic called for in the report could be very valuable in implementing needed instructional reforms.

How will the court-ordered settlement in the special education lawsuit figure into these next steps?

The Governor, Mayor and State Superintendent see these next steps as the unifying vehicle to pull together all of the different elements at play in MPS to drive real change and make systemic reform. The work of Dr. Alan Coulter – who was appointed to oversee court-ordered reforms - will be an important part of the school improvement plan, and the Governor, Mayor and State Superintendent will ensure that they align with the recommendations he will be putting forward.